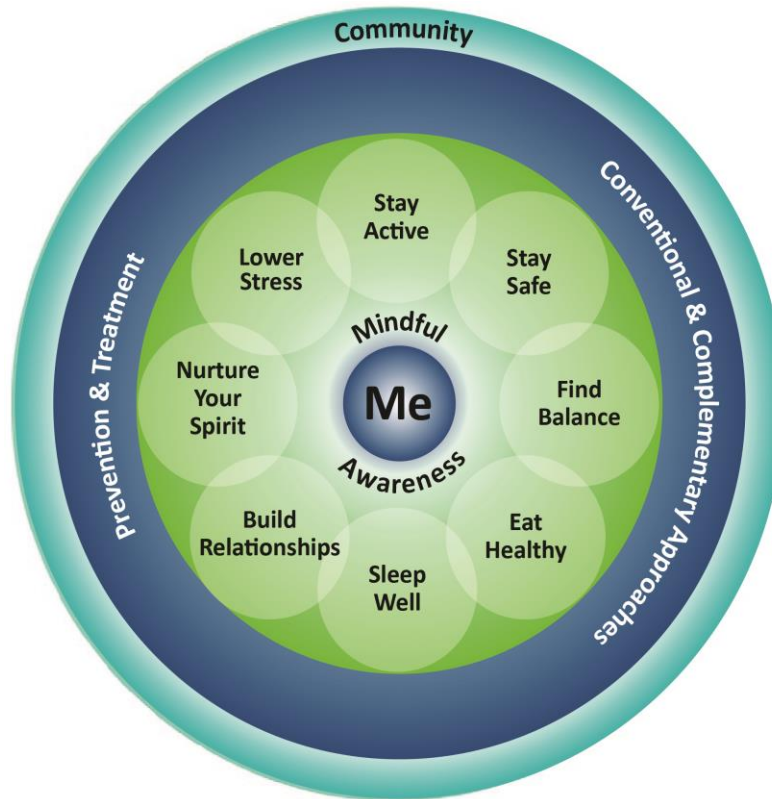


# Well-Being for Older Adults



**Well-Being** is important at all ages. However, as you get older you may need to change how you take care of yourself to meet new challenges and maintain a sense of well-being. You may need to adjust your diet and sleep habits; find new ways to exercise; reach out to build relationships with family and friends; and maintain or find new activities you enjoy.

At VA we want to encourage you to think about other ways you can enhance your well-being. Then we will provide professional care, if you still need it.

Mindfulness – being fully aware or paying attention – can benefit your overall well-being. Your mind and body send signals all the time.

Being mindful allows you to connect to those signals and then to make your best choices about every aspect of your health and well-being.

For more information, visit [www.va.gov/PatientCenteredCare](http://www.va.gov/PatientCenteredCare).



Well-Being is about more than health care. It involves your mental, physical and spiritual health – also called mind, body and spirit – and the other aspects of your life that make you feel satisfied that your life is going well. The parts of well-being are grouped into 8 areas, which are shown on the “well-being circle” above.

For more information, visit [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics).

**Stay Active** – It’s fun and there are health benefits. You may:

- Feel better
- Be more flexible
- Improve your strength and balance
- Lower your blood pressure
- Reduce your risk of falls



Choose activities you enjoy. The “best” exercise or activity is the type you will actually do. The goal is to

keep moving. The photo shows people doing chair exercises, but you may prefer to dance, swim or walk or to do other things.

**Stay Safe** – Being in a safe supportive environment is important at home, work, or out in your community.

- Decrease your risk of falls by checking your home. Check for possible dangers such as poor lighting, slippery floors and throw rugs.
- Ask your primary care team if there are home modifications and/or adaptive equipment (such as shower chairs) that can help.
- Be aware of elder abuse and neglect. Abuse can include financial exploitation – from someone mismanaging your funds to a con artist trying to steal your money.
- Ask for help if you are being harmed, feel unsafe, or suspect exploitation.



**Find Balance** – Maintaining a healthy life balance is a main part of your well-being. There are steps you can take to change what is not working and get back some control and balance in your life.



The key is not to try to change everything at once. Make small changes over time. Find out what works for you.

At any age, it is important to look at how you spend your time. Do things that:

- You enjoy and fit well with your energy level
- Help you relax
- Keep you learning new information or skills
- Help your family
- Serve your community

**Eat Healthy** – Your body and nutritional needs change with age and health conditions. You may not feel thirsty, and forget to drink. Food may not taste as “good” as it used to. Ask for a referral to a dietitian, if needed.



- Drink enough water
- Eat whole grains, lean protein and plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Limit salt, sweets, and unhealthy fats

Your medications may interact with certain foods. Ask your primary care team if there are diet changes you need to make to avoid food/drug interactions.

## Sleep Well

– Sleep helps your body and your mind to function at their best. Consider these sleep tips:



- Wake up at the same time every day
- Exercise regularly, but not within 2 to 4 hours of bedtime
- Do relaxing activities before bed
- Keep your bedroom quiet and cool
- If you nap, only nap early in the day, not in the evening
- Don't have caffeine or tobacco for 6 hours before bedtime
- Don't drink alcohol for 4 hours before bedtime
- Don't watch television for an hour before bedtime

Talk with your primary care provider if you have serious problems with sleep or often feel tired or fatigued.

**Build Relationships** – Being connected to others – even pets – is important.

- People with strong social ties/close relationships are healthier, happier, and live longer.
- Spouses, partners, family and friends can help you stay healthy and support you when you are sick.
- As you age, friends and family may become more involved in your health care or help with everyday tasks.



**Nurture Your Spirit** – People often find that with age, a focus on a larger meaning and purpose in life

becomes more important. This may involve:

- Spending time in nature
- Connecting with art or music
- Quiet time alone
- Faith or a religious practice
- Any activity that fulfills you spiritually



You may continue lifelong-spiritual activities. Or, you may find a new practice that reflects your values.

**Lower Stress** – Your mind impacts your body, in both positive and negative ways. Think about how people use their mind to:

- Lower their blood pressure
- Control pain
- Manage stress



Use mind-body techniques to optimize your body's ability to heal and cope with mental and physical stress. Techniques you might want to try include: mindfulness, relaxing music, yoga, massage, deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.

**Find Programs** – Enhance your well-being through classes, trainings, and other resources – at your VA medical center and in your community.



Ask your VA Social Worker what is available near you or try these tips for finding information and programs that you can use to take charge of your own well-being.



Visit the Well-Being section at [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics) to find programs proven to work for older adults.

Enter your zip code into the online Eldercare Locator, a tool developed by the U.S. Administration on Aging, to find service agencies near you. This resource is also listed in on the Geriatrics website in the Locate Services section.

Visit the Veterans Health Library at VA's National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at [www.prevention.va.gov](http://www.prevention.va.gov) to find links to more information about tips about healthy living, disease prevention and VA wellness programs.

## MyStory: Personal Health Inventory

Living life fully and having optimal health and well-being goes beyond not being sick. It means you think about what matters to you. You look at all areas in your life that contribute to your sense of well-being.

When you think about all 8 areas of well-being it helps you think about your whole health. All of the areas in the well-being circle are important. And, they are all connected. When you improve one area it may benefit other areas in your life and affect your health – in mind, body and spirit.

The personal health inventory tool helps you explore all areas of your life so your health care team can help you plan, not just for your medical needs, but also for your “life” needs.

There are some sample questions in the next column. For the complete tool, visit [www.va.gov/PatientCenteredCare](http://www.va.gov/PatientCenteredCare).

## Sample Questions

1. What REALLY matters to you in life?
2. What brings you a sense of joy and happiness?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being miserable and 5 being great, circle where you feel you are on the scale:

### Physical Well-Being

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Miserable				Great

### Mental/Emotional Well-Being

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Miserable				Great

### How is it to live your day-to-day life?

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Miserable				Great

4. For the 8 well-being areas, think about where you are right now and where you'd like to be. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being low and 5 being high:

### Where are you now?

### Where would you like to be?

Consider these questions for:

Area	Now	Future
Being Active		
Feeling Safe		
Finding Balance		
Eating Healthy		
Sleeping Well		
Your Relationships		
Your Spirit		
Feeling Stressed		

5. Are there any areas you would like to work on? Where might you start?



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